DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 029 JC 930 382

TITLE	Alliance for Excellence: A Partnership between Black Churches & Area Colleges for the Advancement of Minorities in Higher Education.
INSTITUTION	Alliance for Excellence, Blacksburg, VA.
PUB DATE	Jul 93
NOTE	15p.; Paper presented at "Leadership 2000," the Annual Conference of the League for Innovation in the Community College and the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Texas (5th, Washington, DC, July 18-21, 1993).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; Academic Persistence; *Black Achievement; Black Leadership; *Black Students; Church Programs; *Church Role; Community Colleges; *Cooperative Programs; Enrollment; Enrollment Trends; Equal Education; Minority Groups; Program Descriptions; *School Community Relationship; School Holding Power; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students
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ABSTRACT

In an effort to increase opportunities for minorities in higher education in the face of rising costs and decreasing funding, the Alliance for Excellence (AFE) was formed in 1986 in Roanoke, Virginia as a partnership between black churches and community colleges. The partnership seeks to combine the local resources of the colleges with the community-based leadership of black congregations to increase the enrollment of black students at area community colleges to reflect the percentage of the black population in each college area. Moreover, AFE focuses on increasing retention, graduation, and transfer rates of black students. Programs begin with motivational seminars for young children and their families to promote a positive idea of college education. Other AFE efforts include an annual "Black Issues in Focus" program, essay contests for young people on the value of a college education, programs to recognize student achievement at college and past contributions of community members, speakers on special issues in minority education, scholarships, textbook subsidies, minority employment and business fairs, and black church history classes. Between 1984 and 1991, total black student enrollment in the AFE program area increased by 57.7% and black enrollment relative to the general student population increased by 20.8%. Nationally, these figures were 4.1% and -4.8% respectively for the same period. Includes lists of AFE board members and project coordinators and brief descriptions of efforts at Danville Community College and Virginia Western Community College. (PAA)

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ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENCE

A Partnership Between Black Churches & Area Colleges for the Advancement of Minorities in Higher Education

Leadership 2000 Conference
The Fifth Annual Conference on Leadership Development in Community Colleges Sponsored by the League for Innovation in the Community College and the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Texas

Washington, D.C.
July 1993

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Danville Community College in Danville, Virginia
Patrick Henry Community College in Martinsville, Virginia
Virginia Western Community College in Roanoke, Virginia
Central Virginia Community College in Lynchburg, Virginia
Ferrum College in Ferrum, Virginia

ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENCE

A Partnership Between Black Churches & Area Colleges for the Advancement of Minorities in Higher Education

Executive Summary

Alliance for Excellence is a partnership developed by black churches with community colleges for the purpose of increasing opportunities for minorities in higher education. This alliance for educational access and excellence was born in the Gilmer neighborhood of Roanoke, Virginia in 1986. When the minority affairs program at Virginia Western Community College became a victim of budget cuts, members of several black churches, including Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church and St. Paul United Methodist Church, initiated discussions with the college. The principle interest was how black churches and the local community college might work together in order to encourage broader participation in higher education, through local educational opportunities and the possibility of encouraging future studies at four-year institutions.

The key element of this effort is the collaboration of the black church with local public community colleges. Our black churches have an historic commitment to higher education and civil rights. Community colleges are the most accessible and affordable options for post-secondary education. Black churches have provided traditional leadership and influence throughout the minority community. Community colleges provide a variety of educational programs leading to specific vocational certificates, and associate degrees, along with transfer opportunities to four-year colleges. The community college training partnership with business and industry provide the best real avenue for employment beyond the classroom.

Since the advent of this new alliance, minority participation in higher education in this region has increased substantially. Success in this case is measured by black student enrollment at the community colleges. While the program has produced significant results in its first six years, we require continuing support in order to help establish the program on a long-term basis. Alliance for Excellence covers four community college areas and has also received the support of Ferrum College. As the original organizing committee stated, "Alliance for Excellence offers a new vision for promoting academic achievement and personal growth, a new partnership for development and economic advancement utilizing the local educational resources of community colleges and the leadership of black congregations."

ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENCE
A Partnership Between Black Churches & Area Colleges for the Advancement of Minorities in Higher Education

Background

In 1985, the total population of the region was approximately 794,000. This figure includes a minority population of about 170,000 or roughly 20%. The percentage of the total population in each college service region which is black varies from 11.6% in the Roanoke area to over 36% in the Danville area. Minority enrollment varies significantly between the four colleges, yet the participation rate for black students in nationwide and in Virginia's community colleges has historically been about half of the rate of white students.

Southcentral Virginia mirrors the same problems and obstacles which minorities face nationwide regarding post-secondary education and job opportunities. In a recession economy, many lower-income young people are eager to take whatever job opportunities prevail while those with higher-income backgrounds will more likely return to college to pursue other marketable skills. As tuition rates escalate, the danger is that those with lower incomes will remain unemployed, unemployable, or in minimum wage service jobs even after the economic situation improves. Secondly, the Commonwealth of Virginia has cut its overall funding for higher education by 26% since 1990. These funding cuts, typical for many parts of the nation, have resulted in higher tuition and an accompanying reduction in educational services. The first programs to suffer are student services, traditionally the source of minority assistance programs. Thirdly, the recession has sent many unemployed back to college. The increase in the number of students along with the reduction in state funding has threatened to close the open door policy of the community college system.

Though community colleges remain by far the most accessible and affordable avenues for pursuing a college degree or vocational training, many community colleges for the first time ever have been forced to limit enrollment. If the community college funding and enrollment situation becomes even more restricted, what is for many students the only college option will no longer be so accessible. Nationwide between 1988 and 1990, minorities posted a total college enrollment gain of 5.1%. The increase among community colleges was an even higher 6.4%. Yet this increase is threatened by tight educational budgets and declining prospects for employment. While minority participation rates in higher education were increasing, completion rates were declining, perhaps because of the recession and a need by many to find a job, any job. During the period of 1976 to 1989, minority students graduating with bachelors in education declined by over 70%. Graduation rates for black men in life science fields declined during the same period by 39% and in the already depleted engineering fields by almost 9%. The four-year college completion rate for black students is 29%, for their white counterparts 45%. (Minorities in Higher Education, the tenth annual status report of the American Council on Education, 1991).

At the same time, young people, particularly young men, in the black community are facing a very critical time. The plight of the black male is well-documented. A recent study by the

American Council on Education reports "findings of disproportionately greater handicaps being placed on black males as partial explanation for their conspicuous underrepresentation in higher education. It is impossible to understand the dynamic without examining their life circumstances." The median age of black males is more than six years less than their white male counterparts. The death rate for black males in the United States is nearly twice as high as that of white males. Life expectancy is seven years shorter. Incidence of death from malignant disease is nearly 50% higher for black males compared to white males.

During the period of 1973 to 1986, relative employment improved slightly for the white population while the same figures for the black population were stable. However, during that period the real annual earnings for black males between the ages of 20 and 24 fell by 50%. In neighboring southwest Virginia where the coal economy has suffered the worst setbacks, the state-documented unemployment rate for black males age 16-24 was 96% in 1987. A speaker at a recent Alliance for Excellence function shocked the audience when he pointed out that in Virginia today there are more young black males in jail than in college. Statistics are only indicators of what is a serious and pervasive social and economic dilemma for the minority community. One must ask where these problems will lead in ten or twenty years and what are the prospects for black youth in the future. Harry Ashmore wrote: "What results is that we have subjugated a substantial portion of our population and the result is catastrophic, for black males and for our society" (Hearts and Minds: A Personal Chronicle of Race in America, 1988).

Church and educational leaders alike agree that a whole new approach is needed to address the needs of minorities in higher education. The Virginia State Council of Higher Education recently said: "It is expected that minority enrollment will not increase unless some special programs are implemented to concentrate specifically on minority problems." According to Julius Scott of the United Methodist Board of Higher Education, "If a ministry with blacks is to be relevant, new roles and models must be found. In the reappraisal and the recasting of approaches, many [essential] issues must be raised."

Alliance for Excellence offers a new vision for promoting academic achievement and personal growth, a new partnership for development and economic advancement utilizing the local educational resources of community colleges and the leadership of black congregations. In the process, it makes higher education opportunities available in the local community itself and not at some distant campus and encourages the involvement of local black church and community leaders in the educational process. Thus the viability of Alliance for Excellence rests on the black church. The black church has played a prominent role in education throughout its history. Once established as independent congregations, black churches quickly developed the structures and institutions which would further their own advancement. By 1900, the black church had established respected institutions of higher education throughout the country and by the 1960s, many of these congregations and black institutions assumed a prominent role in the burgeoning civil rights movement. Willard Williams wrote for the United Methodist Church: "The black church is a model for the empowerment of blacks. The black church was the launching pad and sustainer of the struggle. The great black leaders of yesterday and today have their roots and nurture in this institution." Black churches are concerned with the quality and accessibility of higher education. Education is a basic civil right, as is the opportunity for community and personal development and advancement.

Description of the Project

Alliance for Excellence is a partnership involving black churches and community colleges for the purpose of enhancing opportunities for minorities in higher education. This alliance for educational access and excellence was born in the Gilmer neighborhood of Roanoke, Virginia in 1986. When the minority affairs program at Virginia Western Community College became a victim of budget cuts, members of several black churches, including Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church and St. Paul United Methodist Church, initiated discussions with the administration. The principle subject was how local black churches might work with the community college in order to encourage broader participation by black students in post-secondary education.

The key element of this effort is the collaboration of the black church with local public community colleges. Black churches have an historic commitment to higher education and civil rights. Community colleges are the most accessible and affordable options for post-secondary education. Black churches are a source of community-based leadership and influence. Community colleges provide a variety of educational programs leading to specific vocational certificates, associate degrees, or transfer opportunities to four-year colleges. Community college partnerships with business and industry provide real employment possibilities beyond the classroom.

Since the advent of this new alliance, minority participation in post-secondary education in this region has increased substantially. Success in this case is measured by rates of enrollment, retention, graduation, and transfer to four-year colleges by black students in comparison with the same rates over the past six years and the same statistics for white majority students. While the program has produced significant results in its first six years, additional support is required to help establish the long-term viability of the program. Alliance for Excellence has established programs in the service regions of four community colleges and, since November 1991, with Ferrum College, a private four-year college affiliated with the United Methodist Church.

Programs involve a broad variety of support efforts for black students (see attached articles and photographs). Programs begin with young children and their families in order to promote the positive "idea" of a college education at an early age. Hundreds of children and their families have participated in numerous motivational seminars designed to promote an interest in a college education. Alliance for Excellence sponsors the annual "Black Issues in Focus" in Lynchburg, essay contests for young people on the value of a college education, and programs to recognize student academic and leadership achievement on each campus and to recognize the past educational contributions of individuals in the community. Alliance for Excellence encourages community support for existing campus programs and black student organizations and the presence of black clergy and other professional role models on campus. Alliance for Excellence sponsors speakers on special issues in minority education, scholarships, counseling, tutorials, textbook subsidies, minority employment and business fairs, "Project Success", and black church history classes. Many civic groups and small businesses have provided support for specific programs, job programs, and seminars in each area. The program has become a model for community support for higher education and was featured in forums at annual conventions of the National Council for Black American Affairs in Atlanta in 1988 and the American Association of Community & Junior Colleges in Washington in 1989.

Goals and Objectives

Since the inception of the program, we have struggled with a way to measure the success of our efforts. It is impossible to fully evaluate how these programs have affected the community or how personal contacts and support may have influenced a young person. However, it is possible to measure the results in terms of enrollment and graduation and the number of students who stay in college over a certain period of time. Therefore, we have selected enrollment as our statistical measure to indicate how the program is progressing. These measures would not only indicate the overall success of our programs, but would demonstrate the effectiveness of this alliance to our educational partners. Alliance for Excellence has adopted the following goals:

(1) To promote the advancement of minorities through higher education.

(2) To collectively engage the educational resources of community colleges, the leadership and influence of black churches, and the cooperation of other organizations for the purpose of offering support services, educational and cultural programs, and sponsoring other efforts which encourage opportunities for minorities in higher education.

(3) To enhance the quality of campus life for minority students and to encourage greater frequency and effectiveness of minority education programs and services.

As a function of these goals, the following objectives were originally adopted by Alliance for Excellence in 1986 and re-affirmed in 1993. Specifically, we organize programs designed to:

(1) Increase minority enrollment at area community colleges to the same level as the percentage of the black population within the general population in each college area.

(2) Increase minority retention and graduation rates at area community colleges to the same level as the percentage of the black population within the general population in each college area.

(3) Increase transfer rates for minority students between community colleges and four-year colleges and universities.

The most readily available statistic is college enrollment by race. We believe this assessment is important for several reasons. First of all, enrollment figures are an indication of the general rate of participation by minority students in a college program. Secondly, it is an indication of the propensity which young people may have toward pursuing a college degree or vocational certificate. Those who enroll in college for whatever purpose have obviously made a choice to continue their education and have probably been encouraged to do so by family, friends, employer, or simply for

economic incentives. Finally, enrollment figures are important to the participating colleges and help the colleges justify their financial contributions. In a period of severe budget cuts, this is no small commitment on their part.

We feel that the number of minorities within the student population should reflect the same ratio as the minority population in the general census. For statistical purposes, we are following the black student enrollment trend on each campus. The statistics are currently being updated for 1993. The number and percentage of other race students varies considerably, but is a generally small figure compared with black and white student enrollment. For general reference, Chart I indicates the percentage of the general population in each service region which is black.

Chart I: A comparison of the number of individuals by race within the general population (1985 approximate).

Community College	Service Area General Population	Service Area Black Population	Percentage
VWCC	275,000	32,000	11.6
PHCC	129,000	28,500	22.1
DCC	166,000	61,000	36.7
CVCC	224,000	49,000	21.9
Totals	794,000	170,500	21.5

Chart II indicates the total enrollment, black enrollment, and the percentages at each institution for the fall semesters of 1984, 1988, and 1991. This comparison helps show the progress of enrollment for students of all races and the same figures for black students. Enrollment statistics are based on fall semester headcount enrollment (total number of individual full and part-time students attending classes) at each institution.

Chart III shows the change in black student enrollment at the four participating community colleges between 1984 and 1991 and a comparison with black student enrollment rates among community colleges nationally during a slightly longer, yet comparable period (1982-1990).

Chart II: Percentage of students who are black enrolled at the four participating community colleges in the fall semesters 1984, 1988, and 1991.

College	1984 Enrollment Total	Black	%	1988 Enrollment Total	Black	%	1991 Enrollment Total	Black	%
VWCC	5,720	416	7.3	6,755	510	7.5	7,531	549	7.3
PHCC	1,835	145	7.9	1,726	226	13.1	2,522	338	13.4
DCC	2,377	388	16.3	2,680	527	19.7	3,616	800	22.1
CVCC	3,683	421	11.4	3,721	487	13.1	4,064	473	11.6
Totals	13,615	1,370	10.1	14,882	1,750	11.8	17,733	2,160	12.2

Since 1984 in the Alliance for Excellence program area, total black enrollment has increased by 57.7% and black enrollment relative to the general student population has increased by 20.8%. National figures are given for the eight-year period of 1982-1990, since 1991 figures are not yet available. During this period nationally, total black enrollment increased by 4.1% and black enrollment relative to the general community college student population actually declined by 4.8%.

Chart III: A comparison of total black student enrollment at the four participating community colleges between 1984 and 1991 and national enrollment figures for a comparable period.

Community College	Black Student Enrollment Fall 1984	Black Student Enrollment Fall 1991	Percent Change
VWCC	416	549	+ 32.0
PHCC	145	338	+ 133.1
DCC	388	800	+ 106.2
CVCC	421	473	+ 12.4
Program Area	1,370	2,160	+ 57.7

	Fall 1982	Fall 1990	Percent Change
All Community Colleges	489,000	509,000	+ 4.1

Plan of Action

Since the inception of our program, we have explored different staff options and a variety of programs. In 1989, the colleges in our area agreed to provide matching funds to help support the work of Alliance for Excellence. With this support we were able to employ a project coordinator in each location and sponsor an advisory group made up of members of the community and representatives from the college. At this point, the future of the program depends on our ability to secure new financial support while we generate local sources of funds for the long-term. With the financial picture in mind, we propose the following plan of action:

(1) Employ staff in each college area.

(2) Continue to support all programs in the respective college regions which address the objectives of Alliance for Excellence.

(3) Develop a more solid financial foundation for the organization, namely:

  (a) Continue existing church relationships.

  (b) Continue our relationship with Ferrum College and the participating community colleges.

  (c) Approach new church partners in 1993 and 1994 and focus on the cultivation of new partners within the black church network.

  (d) Cultivate the support of local committees of church and college leaders.

  (e) Identify regional and national organizations which support innovative minority education programs and whose interests and potential funding goals coincide with Alliance for Excellence.

(4) Evaluate staff and programs on an annual basis and conduct a comprehensive review in 1994 and every three years thereafter to assess program, staff, and goals.

(5) Encourage and nurture membership of the local advisory groups and enhance their working relationship with the project coordinators, including strengthening communications between the groups and the Alliance for Excellence Board of Directors.

Structure and Administration

Alliance for Excellence is organized under the auspices of a regional Board of Directors. The Board works through local community leaders who form an advisory group in each college

area. Project coordinators are employed in each area and work with the advisory group to design programs most suitable for that community. The following are names and addresses of the sixteen current members of the Board of Directors. Thirteen members are black, two are white, one is Asian, two are white. The board consists of nine men and seven women.

Robert Bashore	Central Virginia Community College
Joseph Berryman	Pleasant Valley Baptist Church
Andrea Burney	Danville Community College
Willie Butler	Randolph St. United Methodist Church
Stephen Darr (Treasurer)	Alliance for Excellence
Anand Dyal-Chand	Ferrum College
Mark Gibson	Ferrum College
Joe Keen	Patrick Henry Community College
Thomas Johnson (Vice-President)	Bethel Baptist Church, Danville
Lee Lewis	Morning Star Baptist Church, Roanoke
Gloria Lindsey	Virginia Western Community College
Rev. Gregory Maddox	Guilfield Baptist Church
Muriel Mickles (President)	Central Virginia Community College
Sandy Saunders (Secretary)	Danville Community College
Catherine Seay	Patrick Henry Community College
Diana Wright-Coleman	Diamond Hill Baptist Church

Each local advisory group consists of representatives from the black community and the local community college. Each group has its own officers and program committees. One Board member in each area is designated as the support person for the local project coordinator. Alliance for Excellence functions under set of by-laws revised in 1988 and is incorporated as a non-profit organization consistent with regulations of section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. Project coordinators are responsible for overall program planning and implementation in their college regions in cooperation with the local advisory committee. Project coordinators are:

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Regional and Local Programs

Alliance for Excellence sponsors a variety of activities designed to promote education and its future career and life benefits. As an example, the following are a few of the programs being sponsored in the Danville and Roanoke areas.

Danville Community College

Programs offered in the Danville area include the Southside Regional Conference on the African-American Male (program attached); tutorial programs offered in area churches for minority students; campus tours to Danville Community College and Ferrum College for groups from the community and area churches; essay contests for students in grades 5-8 addressing the theme "What Excellence Means to Me"; regular motivational seminars in Danville, South Boston/Halifax County, and Pittsylvania County for grades young people of all ages and their families; receptions for local educators, youth leaders, pastors, and community leaders to promote Alliance for Excellence; partnerships with people of other community organizations as mentors and tutors; activities and seminars among church and community leaders; the new Danville Community College Gospel Choir; Career Expo which serves as host for displays and programs by black professionals and business leaders who share their experience, inspiration, and motivation with minority youth; and the Awards and Recognition Programs which honor area high school seniors and students of Danville Community College who have excelled in academic achievement and leadership in campus life.

Virginia Western Community College

Many programs are duplicated throughout the region when one is successful. In this way, colleges can build on the successes of their partner institutions and share the rewards and successes and avoid conflicts or problems. Programs offered in the Roanoke area include an upcoming Conference on the African-American Male; tutorial programs offered in area churches for minority students; campus tours to Virginia Western Community College for groups from the community and area churches; essay contests for students in grades 6-8 addressing the theme "What Excellence Means to Me"; motivational seminars for young people of all ages and their families; luncheons and programs for area ministers to promote Alliance for Excellence and its objectives; programs of cultural enrichment through speakers and concerts; striving to develop partnerships with people of other community organizations as mentors and tutors; and the Awards and Recognition Programs which honor area high school students and students of Virginia Western Community College who have excelled in academic achievement and leadership.

Similar initiatives are offered in the service regions of Patrick Henry Community College and Central Virginia Community College, including an annual "Black Issues in Focus" gathering in the Lynchburg area which each year addresses different issues facing the black community. Programs are developed with the leadership of the black church community as well as campus organizations such as the African American Student Association at Virginia Western Community College.

Tax Status & Correspondence

Alliance for Excellence is recognized as a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization by the Internal Revenue Service. Contributions and grants to Alliance for Excellence are tax-deductible in accordance with applicable tax regulations. Copies of the IRS determination letter are available on request. Correspondence and inquiries may be addressed to any project coordinator directly or to the organization's central mailing address:

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